L&D GLOBAL SENTIMENT SURVEY

FOCUS REPORT

AI in L&D:

From talk to action

By Donald H Taylor and Egle Vinauskaite

Introduction

Key findings of this research

A lot can happen in five months. Our previous report, *AI in L&D: The state of play* was published on 30 November 2023, the anniversary of the ChatGPT launch. It showed that after 12 months of extraordinary technical progress, speculation, and argument about artificial intelligence (AI), adoption by learning and development (L&D) practitioners had been slow. Of the employers responding to the survey, 45% were either taking no action or were only experimenting with AI – and this was among a self-selecting group of broadly enthusiastic respondents.

Where did this low adoption rate come from? It wasn't a lack of interest. In February 2024, the L&D Global Sentiment Survey (GSS) reported a fascination with AI across more than 3,000 respondents. In answer to 'What will be hot in workplace L&D in 2024?', AI topped the overall table and dominated every geography and demographic in the survey. Votes for it were substantially larger than any other option in the survey's 11-year history, having leapt to 21.5% from a lowly 12th position in 2022 of just 4.7%.

Now, five months after the November report, L&D is beginning to put AI to work. This report explores what is happening in two parts.

We begin with a broad view of what L&D practitioners are doing, based on a survey of 317 respondents. This is followed by a collection of case studies exploring the application of AI in deeper detail.

AI in L&D: The state of play showed that L&D expected the key initial benefit of AI would come in content production. This report shows that expectation has become a reality. L&D is indeed using AI for a range of content tasks that would previously require much more time or, in some cases, specialist skills. For better or worse, it is now possible to create more, better-looking, content faster than ever. The gains are extraordinary, but they remain efficiency improvements within the L&D department.

While content production has long been a slow and resource-intensive process ripe for AI disruption, we know that it takes more than content to build human capability. Knowledge capture and discovery, skill development, personalised learning and career paths and data-informed talent development are just some of the key weapons in L&D's arsenal, and AI can improve them all.

We have chosen to explore a handful of rich applications of AI beyond content creation. Readers will notice that these examples require the L&D department to work increasingly closely with the rest of the business: making a business case, accessing data and expertise, collaborating with internal stakeholders, and testing the solutions.

Working like this requires a demanding mixture of abilities – technical smarts certainly, but also skills in relationship building and negotiation as well as knowledge of the business overall. We have come a long way from the sole responsibility of the training department being the provision of a schedule of courses.

AI generated huge interest in 2023. It was also the single greatest concern for L&D practitioners, according to the GSS. We hope this report will address some of those concerns by demonstrating practical ways in which AI is already being used by L&D.

This technology opens up huge possibilities. The question is now whether L&D is ready to take advantage of them.

Donald H Taylor
Egle Vinauskaite

Contents

Putting AI to use in L&D

This report's two parts examine the uses of AI in L&D in two different ways. This part explores the results of a short survey.

Survey methodology

The quantitative piece of this research was an online survey conducted for 41 days from 28 February to 8 April 2024.

A survey is a blunt tool for looking into the use of AI. Some of the over 300 respondents may be using AI strategically to influence capability across their entire organisation, and this will be represented in this survey only by a tick in a box. In the case study part of this report, we explore the strategic power of AI, going beyond the tactical. There, we see how ambitious innovators in our field are harnessing AI to deploy it strategically, aiming for impact that extends beyond improving the efficiency of the L&D department.

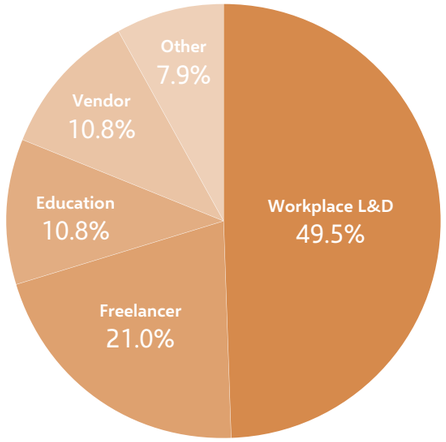
In contrast to the case studies, the survey provides a broad view of current uses of AI in L&D. It will also provide a quantitative benchmark in the future as we assess the progress – or otherwise – of AI adoption.

The short survey consisted of three questions:

1. How are you using AI right now or planning to use it in the next 3 months? (multiple-choice, obligatory)
2. What is the most interesting AI use case you have seen in your organisation (in L&D or beyond)? (free text)
3. Where do you do most of your work? (multiple-choice)

The survey was publicised via email and LinkedIn, meaning that the 317 respondents were self-selecting and unlikely to be representative of the overall population of L&D practitioners. They are more likely to be among the enthusiasts and early adopters on the Everett Rogers diffusion of innovation curve.

Figure 1: Where respondents worked

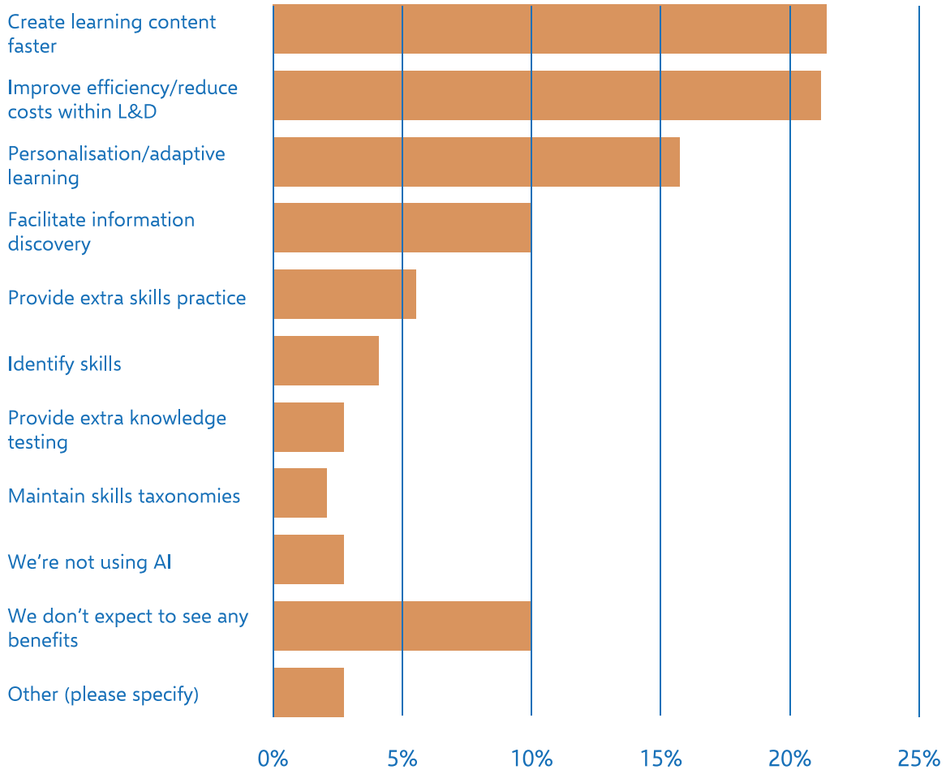


Location data was collected using respondents' IP addresses.

Respondents came from 45 countries; 25% were based in the UK, 20% in the USA.

Together with India, Australia, Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany, these seven countries made up over two-thirds of respondents.

Figure 2: Expected benefits of using AI in L&D, November 2023



Figures from November 2023

For over a year there has been considerable discussion about the potential for AI in L&D. Against this speculation, this survey aimed to provide a quantifiable view of L&D's use of AI at the beginning of 2024.

To set the context for the current survey, it is worth reviewing the previous report, published in November 2023, to see what people expected of AI in L&D, one year after the launch of ChatGPT.The key expectation in November 2023 was that AI would help with content. This was evident not only in the most popular choice here – 'Create content faster' – but also in their second – 'Improve efficiency/reduce costs within L&D'.

In a further survey question, the respondents who chose 'Improve efficiency/reduce costs within L&D' also indicated that their current use of AI was focused on content generation.

The third most popular option on this chart showed an expectation that AI could help with the personalisation of learning delivery. In contrast, the use of AI to support skills initiatives proved far less popular, even though skills featured in three of the available options.

Discussion of results

How did these expectations of AI in L&D compare with this year's survey of their actual use?

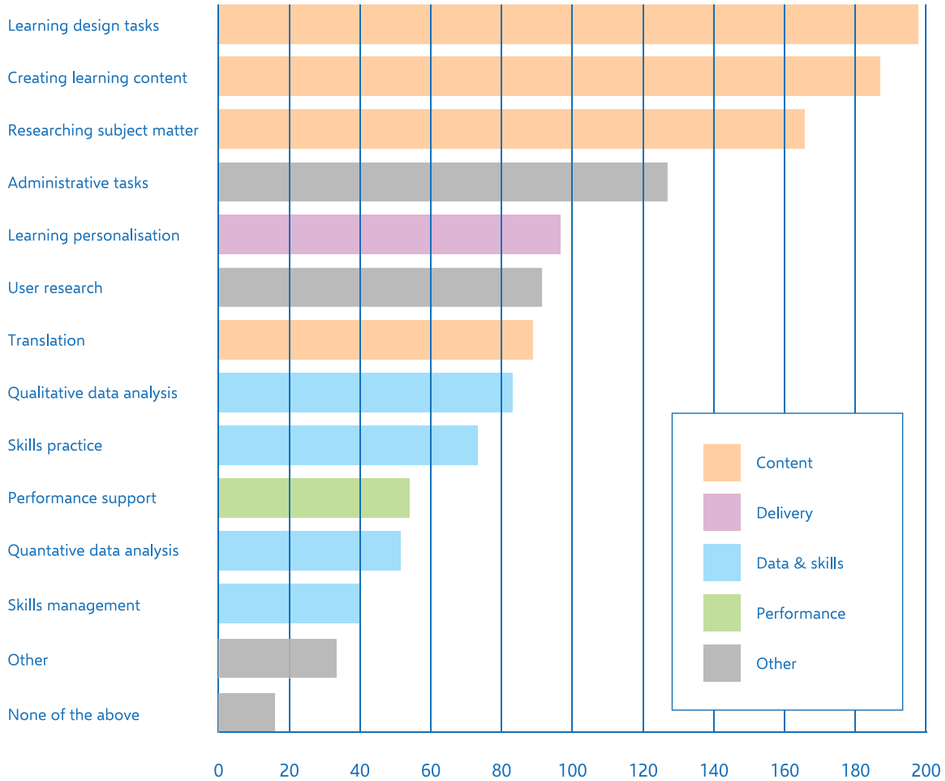
The key question in this year's short survey, and the only mandatory one, was: 'How are

you using AI right now or planning to use it in the next 3 months?' Respondents were presented with a randomly sorted multiple-choice list of 14 items, including 'Other' and 'None of the above', from which they could choose any number of items. The average number of options chosen was 4.1, with 41 respondents choosing just one option and six choosing all 12. 'None of the above' was chosen by 17 people.

The options appeared in the survey as follows:

- *Administrative tasks (reports, emails, internal comms, etc)*
- *Creating learning content*
- *Learning design tasks (course outlines, quiz questions, learning activities, etc)*
- *Learning personalisation (content curation, adaptive learning, etc)*
- *Performance support (eg AI assistants providing employees with immediate help)*
- *Qualitative data analysis (eg analysing words provided in feedback)*
- *Quantitative data analysis (eg analysing data about user behaviour across platforms)*
- *Researching subject matter*
- *Skills management (skills intelligence tools, talent marketplaces, etc)*
- *Skills practice (eg via AI coaching, conversational bots)*
- *Translation*
- *User research (writing interview scripts, analysis etc)*
- *Other*
- *None of the above*

Figure 3: Uses of AI in L&D, March-April, 2024



The design, creation, and translation of content clearly dominate the current use of AI in L&D. Personalisation, a strong third place among November's expectations, is not as well placed in the table of current use.

AI can enable content development in different ways as well, for example, through data analysis and user research. As content development becomes easier, AI could become part of the process of deciding what learning solutions to create. There is some evidence in the free text answers (see 'Other uses of AI') that this is happening, but given how powerful this can be, it seems to represent an under-exploited power of AI.

On the skills side, the table shows that Skills practice is used by nearly twice as many respondents as Skills management. This is not surprising. Skills practice includes a range of possibilities, some quite simple, and will be used by almost every L&D department. In contrast, skills management is a complex task that will take longer to implement and is currently mostly pursued by larger employers.

We do not know exactly what respondents are doing with any of these options, including Skills practice, but, interestingly, Skills practice places above Performance support on the table.

Performance support is a substantial opportunity for L&D. AI could provide the mechanism to deliver the right, actionable content at the right time, something L&D has found challenging in the past.

At present, AI can enable performance support in at least two ways. The simple way is to use AI to relatively quickly produce resources based on large documents, longer courses, recordings and transcripts of training events. The more advanced way often involves plugging an AI assistant into organisational data to make it searchable.

This can stop at better quality search of internal resources, or it can extend to a corporate GPT fine-tuned to your company's data. In the answers to the free-text question (see 'Other uses of AI') there is evidence that this is happening in a handful of organisations. Such advanced tools, however, require access to internal data, and as we saw in the previous report, that brings up information security concerns and requires trust building. The decision to introduce these tools is also usually made at the C-level and not by the L&D department. It may be that these factors are preventing L&D making the most of this opportunity.

Finally, L&D can also use AI for performance support through general purpose tools such as Microsoft Copilot. The low placement of Performance support in this survey might be partly because respondents did not view Microsoft Copilot as Performance support tool. It could be that they don't regard Microsoft Copilot as an AI tool. It may simply be that Microsoft Copilot is not yet widely used.

Consistent content

The number of respondents from the UK (80) and USA (63) is not significant enough to indicate any national trends for either country. In a small sample size, it only takes a few votes to shift the relative positions of options on a table

Figure 4: Survey responses from the USA and UK

Focus 02 United States	
Task	**Number of Responses**
1. Learning design tasks	38
2. Researching subject matter	36
3. Creating learning content	33
4. Administrative tasks	27
5. Learning personalisation	17
6. Qualitative data analysis	16
7. User research	15
8. Performance support	15
9. Skills practice	14
10. Quantitative data analysis	12
11. Translation	12
12. Other	9
13. Skills management	9
14. None of the above	7

Focus 02 United Kingdom	
Task	**Number of Responses**
1. Learning design tasks	46
2. Researching subject matter	41
3. Creating learning content	40
4. Administrative tasks	28
5. User research	25
6. Learning personalisation	24
7. Qualitative data analysis	24
8. Translation	17
9. Skills practice	16
10. Quantitative data analysis	16
11. Performance support	12
12. Skills management	8
13. Other	8
14. None of the above	4

Remarkably, this has not happened here. The relative positions of the top four options are the same in both counties. And on each table, only one vote separates the options placed #5 to #7.

Translation ranks #8 on the UK table and #11 on the US table. For the 174 respondents on the poll outside the UK and the US, however, it ranks at #5, suggesting a powerful use of AI for translation outside the anglophone world, most likely for translating out of English.

The same dominance of the top options is seen when we assess the results split by workgroups. Whether respondents identified as working in an internal workplace L&D team, as a freelancer, for a vendor, or in education, the three highest-ranked options in each workgroup remained the same: Learning design tasks, Creating learning content and Researching subject matter. Content dominates the current use of AI in L&D among our respondents.

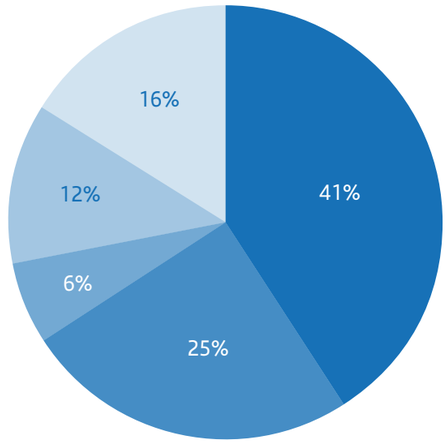
Other uses of AI

The only free-text question on the survey was: What is the most interesting AI use case you have seen in your organisation (in L&D or beyond)? Although we left this open, allowing respondents to choose any use of AI, almost all the 235 responses looked at the use of AI in learning and performance in their organisation. This proved to be an unexpected source of additional insight into current AI practice in L&D.

As well as reading all the comments, we checked them against 38 word stems. These word stems represented the most commonly occurring words among the total of nearly 3,500 submitted. They did not include words which were common but implied no particular use of AI, such as 'based', 'use' or 'learning' itself.

We were able to categorise 79% of the comments into five categories. Comments could sit in more than one category:

Figure 5: Distribution of answers to Q2



Content	41%
Performance	25%
Other	6%
Technology focus	12%
Skills & data	16%

Given the results elsewhere in the survey, it is not surprising that Content is the dominant category, but this does not necessarily mean respondents were using AI to create content directly, for example:

- *"[We used AI for] Creating rubrics on a topic the learning team didn't know about. They used this before they went to speak to the SME to get a sense of the likely performance outcomes and were able to build a much slimmer intervention as a result."*

Much of the commentary around content creation regarded AI in a level-headed way as a tool to accelerate the process, rather than something providing complete automation, for example:

- *"Currently, the most interesting use is interrogating content to develop questions - not all are brilliant, but they provide a "starting point" for editing, rather than creation..."*

This respondent went on to add:

- *"...use of GPT-connected chatbots (not just those with pre-loaded answers) to guide people by assessing their understanding and suggesting (or producing) useful content or activities is a very interesting road for AI to go down."*

Others shared this sense that the use of AI in content development would prompt them to go further:

- *"AI's most practical application [in L&D] so far has been in content creation and curation. From crafting quizzes to enhancing storytelling and handling large-scale data processing, AI has proven invaluable in these fields, but I'm encouraged to explore the usage of AI in other spheres this year."*

Comments focused on the use of AI for skills were sometimes frustratingly short. The short phrases 'Assessment of skills' and 'Data analysis' left so many questions unanswered!

Elsewhere, the idea of using AI to understand skills was reported in some comments that revealed a more sophisticated approach to skills:

- *"We are using AI to list skills they possess from their CV, then to match to skills from interested job roles or skills they would like to develop for future projects or roles or of career development."*
- *"Matching (skills) profiles of our employees with vacancies for internal mobility to discover unseen potential."*
- *"Identification of capability gaps - analytics outlined huge behavioral issues that the org needed to address as opposed to capability gaps that had minimal impact."*
- *"Skill requirement analysis based on job vs personal profile."*

There is scope here for further research looking at what exactly is happening in these instances, and how effective it is.

Finally, a number of respondents cited the use of AI for performance-improving skills practice and support, such as 'Training simulators and role plays' and 'Using AI for coaching in leadership'.

Examples include:

- *"Skills practice for front-line agents (presentation skills, negotiation, managing angry customers)."*
- *"Conversational chatbots to support some of our agents in their skill development responding to various customer queries using models we previously delivered face to face and with case studies."*
- *"Software that presents several scenarios to learners and they talk as if in a real conversation. The AI responds based on the input and after the conversation gives a score and feedback based on the interaction."*
- *"Using generative AI for building highly personalized and adaptive immersive skills development simulators."*

The range of use cases revealed in these free text comments and the mature thinking they reflect shows that L&D practitioners are currently using AI in a range of ways that go beyond simply creating pretty content quickly. And even when they are using it for content, they are often using it in sophisticated ways.

Case studies

In this section of the report, you will find case studies showcasing AI used for different aims, with different approaches. Some relied on the skills available internally in their L&D team, while others brought in external experts. Some exploited their existing tools, while others decided to build their own or do both.

It has become clear that there is no one way to use AI in L&D. It is also evident that once L&D moves beyond using generative AI for content creation and more basic learning design tasks, it needs to collaborate with the wider business. In fact, it seems that the more sophisticated the use case, the more L&D needs to bring in the skills, knowledge, data and technology from elsewhere in the business.

We can represent this on a Complexity Scale - see Figure 6.

To find the case studies in this report, we reached out to learning leaders in our networks individually, asked for recommendations, and placed requests in newsletters and on LinkedIn asking L&D practitioners to tell us their stories of using AI.

Please note: these are not marketing case studies with a clear end and neat impact metrics. Many of these projects are incomplete. Some were still in pilot at the time of interviewing. We want to recognise that the L&D leaders who agreed to participate and tell their stories have in many cases done so without a certainty of success, which makes their contributions even more valuable and representative of the experimental and iterative nature of AI deployment.

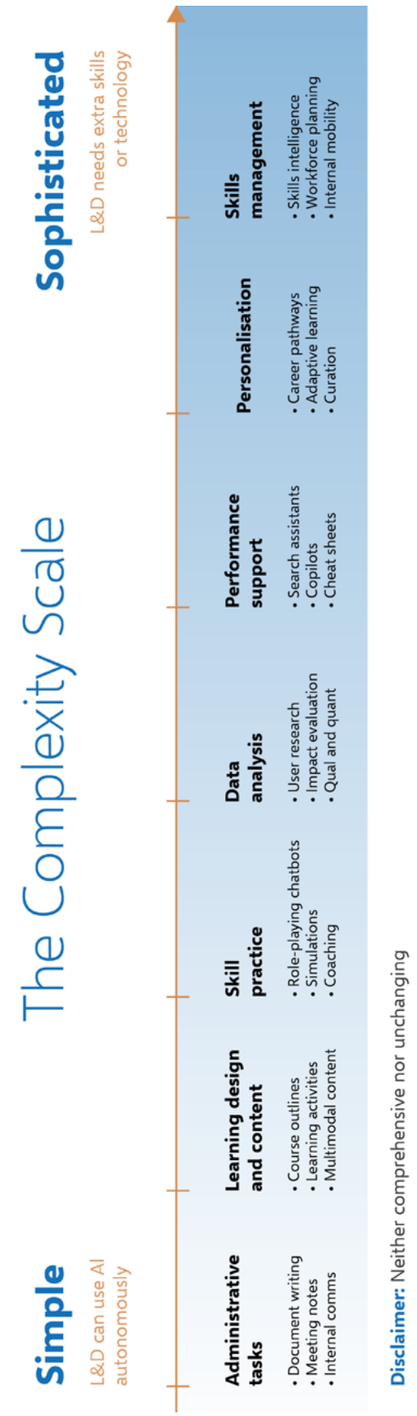
You will see some vendors mentioned. We do not benefit from this, financially or in any other way. The mention of a vendor is not necessarily a recommendation. The goal of this report is to help the L&D community imagine what can be done with AI and how to do it.

After careful consideration, we decided that being specific about the tools used would help make the case studies more practical and help our colleagues understand the resources involved in technology rollouts of this kind.

We hope you find the following case studies useful and illuminating.

If you would like to see your own case study in the next report, please reach out to either Donald or Egle. Our contact details are at the end of the report.

Figure 6: The Complexity Scale



Case study 1 - Bayer

Moving compliance content strategy towards a hybrid model

Dr. Ashwin Mehta, Global Learning Technology and Innovation Director

Abstract: *The cost of production and the opportunity cost of consumption of compliance materials are very high in the highly regulated life sciences industry. Dr. Ashwin Mehta's team have achieved significant savings by using generative AI to produce rich media and role-based compliance learning, further supported by a point-of-need virtual agent.*

Problem and solution

Bayer is a life science company working in healthcare and agriculture sectors. It has about 100,000 employees distributed across 80 countries.

As a company operating in a highly regulated industry, Bayer requires new joiners to complete an extensive compliance onboarding which spans 90 standard operating procedures and hundreds of pages of content. Due to its sheer volume, the content has proven exceedingly expensive to produce and difficult for learners to retain and use in their jobs. Additionally, the time they spend going through the content adds up to a sizable opportunity cost.

AI has allowed Bayer to rethink its content strategy and move from manual towards hybrid content production. The solution combines generative AI to automate some of the content creation and pairs it up with a virtual agent for point-of-need procedural support.

Created by a multi-disciplinary team of learning designers, learning developers, technologists and AI developers, it has several layers:

- *Bayer has developed a secure large language model (LLM) used to summarise procedural documents and produce multi-modal (text or image) output. With the help of third-party SaaS tools, the summaries can then be quickly transformed into rich media such as video and animation, and packaged into e-learning using existing authoring tools.*
- *The same document summary function is used to transform multiple procedural pdf documents into role-based content. In effect, this personalises the content and gives people everything they need to know to do their jobs, rather than asking them to memorise a list of generic procedures.*
- *For more contextualised learning, learning designers use the LLM to help them create a bank of scenarios that are then presented in an adaptive way to teach certain procedures.*

All of this will be supported by a virtual agent, a custom-made co-pilot that people can ask about relevant procedures in the flow of work. Among other benefits, this virtual agent helps reduce people's reliance on memory from their initial onboarding. It is being created by a small team of AI developers experienced in Azure (Microsoft's cloud computing platform), chatbot development, and robotic process automation.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- ***Lack of buy-in:*** *AI is a scary term and the fear of the unknown might make people unwilling to use it even if it would be beneficial.*
- ***Mobilising resources:*** *It took some time to bring in all the necessary people into the project to get it off the ground.*
- ***Risk management:*** *A lot of due diligence was required to work within very stringent governance around data and cybersecurity, which meant that the team couldn't just spin up the solution and play with it. Due diligence and testing was required to ensure accuracy of LLM output.*

Next steps

1. Pushing the AI further to create richer digital learning experiences. One of the solutions that has already been built (but not deployed) uses the same AI capabilities to create a learning game scenario which features a narrative structure and multiple characters having AI-generated dialogue.
2. Rethinking the format of the virtual agent's output. Right now, it only displays its responses as text but there is an opportunity to experiment with large multi-modal models and employ machine-led, rather than human-led, design to show people the information that they need to know in the most appropriate format.
3. Solving the compliance element of the virtual agent. While traditional compliance courses validate the learning with a check box, work continues to analyse conversations with a virtual agent to give auditable assurance.

> *"Content generation is where you take text and make another type of content out of it, whereas content enrichment is taking content and using it to build, say, a game world. The ambition is different."*
>
> **Dr. Ashwin Mehta,** Global Learning Technology and Innovation Director

Case study 2 - mci group

Transforming in-person events into a usable knowledge base

Avinash Chandarana, Global Learning and Development Director

Abstract: *In-person events pack a lot of value but, too often, the content shared by speakers, trainers, and participants vanishes the moment the event ends. Avinash Chandarana and his team have leveraged an AI-powered learning management system (LMS) to not only capture but also preserve the content and interactions from these events. This unique approach transforms moments in time into a durable, searchable knowledge base, enabling continuous learning and providing actionable insights across mci group's global offices.*

Problem and solution

mci group is a global organisation offering solutions in engagement marketing and events, digital, social and content marketing, strategic communication and association management. It has 1,700 employees in 31 countries.

Avinash heads MCI Institute, the group's centre of excellence for learning and development, which offers a wide array of online educational resources and programmes for its global workforce. Despite the immediate benefits of in-person training also offered by MCI Institute, the loss of shared content post-event presented a significant loss.

In response, the L&D team launched a pilot at the institute's business academy, attended by 300 global leaders. They harnessed AI to synthesise the event's content and discussions, while simultaneously funnelling the wealth of information into the company's LMS. This innovation keeps the crucial insights from in-person events available and relevant long after the events have concluded.

The catalyst for this initiative was the introduction of a new LMS, switchai, which was adopted in two months and adapted to support live event content capture. This innovative 'learning and knowledge companion' would capture the essence of live content and interactions, automatically generating follow-up summaries and action lists for each session within switchai. With content already captured, it would then pave the way to create post-event micro-courses that reinforced learning and expanded access company-wide. The AI-powered LMS enables:

- ***Content and reflection capture:*** *Digital boards captured interactions, enabling leaders to create localised action plans from AI-summarised insights.*
- ***Rapid session summaries:*** *Participants received immediate summaries of sessions with actionable takeaways, enhancing the learning experience while on site.*
- ***The power of search:*** *Using prompts within the LMS (switchai) to interact with the outputs, e.g. to produce an executive summary relevant for a particular team or office, create an action list, or to analyse sentiment.*
- ***Building a knowledge base:*** *Making both the delivered content and the participant outputs searchable for anyone with access to the platform, and building the corporate knowledge base over time.*

The solution was implemented by three internal L&D team members with experience in software integration, project management, and data. It was done in collaboration with Sana, which powers the switchai platform. The solution also required a separate integration of sound capture during each of the live sessions.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- ***Creativity:*** *As no AI tool perfectly fitted the challenge, the focus shifted to leveraging existing tools applied in a real-time, live event setting. This underscored the importance of inventive solutions over budget constraints and the ability to adapt and apply technology creatively.*
- ***Communication:*** *It was essential to prepare speakers and participants. Speakers needed to understand how technology would capture their presentations, while participants were informed that the event was an experiment showcasing AI's potential to enhance live training sessions.*
- ***Endorsement from the top:*** *Having mci group's CEO interact with the new tool, sharing his own reflections, was pivotal – a strong endorsement of the tool's significance and value.*
- ***Framing the 'Why':*** *By explaining the 'Why' and connecting it to the broader company strategy, leaders had a direct experience of AI's role in learning and development, making the concept both concrete and impactful. As a result, over 95% of attendees actively engaged with the platform, contributing their reflections and takeaways.*

Next steps

1. Scaling content: Modifying and leveraging captured content to distribute across various target groups, globally. While the content was aimed at 300 company leaders, select 'masterclasses' will be applicable and made available to a broader target group.
2. Repurposing content: Creating micro courses out of the captured training content and participant reflections, ultimately making them available globally in a format that employees would find engaging and actionable.

> *"By using AI to capture the best moments and insights from our academy, we've really changed the game and transformed our L&D approach in such settings. It's about taking those once-fleeting moments and adding valuable content into our knowledge base, giving something solid to build on..."*

Avinash Chandarana, Global Learning and Development Director

Case study 3 - Roche

Creating a holistic strategy for AI-enabled innovation in L&D

Detlef Hold, Head of People and Organisational Capabilities

Abstract: *In a company that approaches AI integration as a strategic imperative for its core business, learning teams have the tools and mandate to experiment with AI in L&D use cases and integrate AI as a holistic enabler for learning strategy execution. Detlef Hold acts as a sounding board to L&D teams and explains how they explore AI to innovate their strategy, help individuals get familiar with AI, and assess the value of AI adoption and its scalability.*

Problem and solution

Roche is a multinational biotechnology company employing around 100,000 people. As a provider of diagnostics and pharmaceuticals, it might significantly benefit from using AI for better, faster and more targeted development of new medicines and digital patient solutions. For this reason, Roche is experimenting with AI both in business teams and in L&D teams.

For example, a learning team that enables capability building for a global business function of 6,000 people has pulled together a business case for AI and got buy-in from leadership to further develop the roadmap for AI adoption in L&D. The roadmap has three levels:

1. **Individual:** creating a safe space where learning professionals can try out AI and build their knowledge and skills through coaching from an internal AI expert team, community sessions with peer exchange on AI use cases, and access to extensive resources of an internal Data Academy to learn prompting and help expand data analytics skills required for effectively using AI in learning.
2. **Product:** finding opportunities in the L&D product portfolio to gain either productivity, efficiency or creativity improvements. This involves selecting a few products or services L&D is delivering to the business, then e.g. experimenting with using AI for better design.
3. **Organisational:** building networks and connections with other groups in the business. For example, connecting different L&D groups to strengthen the company-wide L&D community, or connecting with internal AI and data experts that could be brought in to support L&D initiatives. Additionally, some groups explored how to include AI skills as part of core capabilities in individual development conversations.

Similarly, the People and Organizational Growth team (i.e. the team that sits under Human Resources and has a broader scope than the L&D teams that support different business functions) has received a mandate from the global head of its group to develop a strategy for AI integration in L&D.

The innovation happens at two levels:

1. Innovating in the portfolio of L&D delivery solutions
2. Innovating in the ways of working, e.g. content curation, analysis, personalization etc

Some of the AI solutions that various L&D teams at Roche are experimenting with include:

- *A custom AI tutoring system that helps move away from programmatic, one-size-fits-all, linear onboarding towards a personalized one, where new hires can access relevant information through AI-enabled dialogue, and receive timely performance support.*
- *A custom 'AI learning companion' to develop coaching skills. Developed by an individual in the L&D team, the bot has been trained on the GROW coaching model and the company's own coaching framework to create different practice scenarios.*
- *A feedback practice tool which enables people to develop their feedback skills with the help of a bot trained on the company's feedback model which is used for development and performance management. The tool could complement human-to-human practice.*
- *Custom knowledge management bots help navigate the company's body of knowledge.*

Challenges and lessons learnt

- ***Individual trailblazers:*** *Before you get a mandate, someone has to initiate things, start experimenting with various solutions and convince other people to join. Innovation with AI isn't only a strategic top-down process, it also requires community-based and grassroots efforts.*
- ***Mandate from senior leadership:*** *A clear mandate can't be underestimated. It enables you to ask for resources and support, to buy licences, to work on experiments in a more formalized way and will help align the time for AI experimentation with current business priority demands.*
- ***Integration:*** *AI use shouldn't be a separate thing – it should be integrated as a core capability into L&D's remit and structure, including its areas of practice such as design and curation.*

Next steps

1. Finding a proof of concept for the use of AI in L&D among the various performance support and skill development experiments listed earlier in this case study. They will be measured in terms of gains in either quality, scalability, speed or cost.
2. Defining a strategy for how to integrate AI into L&D's entire portfolio based on the outcomes of the experiments and

> *"An entrepreneurial mindset is really decisive, particularly in large organisations where an innovative idea might get lost in the pure size and complexity of the system."*
>
> **Detlef Hold,** Head of People and Organisational Capabilities

Case study 4 - Ericsson

Taking a strategically smart, approach to AI innovation in L&D

Pauline Rebourgeon, Head of Learning Technology and Innovation

Abstract: *Ericsson has a deliberate, strategic approach to adopting AI in L&D. This has led to the successful adoption of a range of tools, and wide experimentation. Adoption comes at the end of a process of community engagement and testing and sits within a strategic approach that has buy-in from stakeholders at all levels.*

Problem and solution

Ericsson is a Swedish multinational networking and telecommunications company with over 100,000 employees headquartered in Stockholm. With a strong engineering outlook, Ericsson is aware that AI can be successfully applied in different ways across all departments.

The issue is how to explore this potential in a large organisation: how to combine the need for an agile approach with strategic intent. The L&D function needed to harness the enthusiasm of individuals in a way that used Ericsson's extensive experience across a range of functions while minimising the potential for wasted effort. The company decided on an approach that guided experimentation with three elements: a set of workstreams, a community and a decision-making process.

The first element is a set of four workstreams for the exploration and adoption of AI in L&D:

- *Content creation and curation*
- *Coaching and simulations*
- *Enablement and personalisation*
- *Skills and assessment*

Ericsson focuses on these four areas because it believes that these are where they currently have the greatest likelihood of short-term success combined with long-term value.

Research into each of these is coordinated by Pauline Rebourgeon, Head of Learning Technology and Innovation, but – importantly – it is not conducted solely by the L&D department. This is where the second of these elements comes in, the Learning NEXT community.

Pauline runs this network of about 450 people, all interested in using new technologies in learning. When Pauline joined Ericsson at the beginning of 2022, it was a team of about 20 people, but under Pauline's guidance it has grown from a small project team of 5-10 L&D personnel to a wide, varied, voluntary community with members from many different functions and departments.

The community consists of Ericsson employees from all over the globe and all areas of the business who are enthusiastic about using a range of cutting-edge technologies in their work. It allows employees to experiment and test the potential of these technologies, of which AI is one. An important role is bringing the expertise of technical teams into the conversation about AI in L&D.

It works, says Pauline, for two reasons. "First, it enables people to test and experiment with AI at work, and to fail. It is understood that not everything will work, and that is part of the process. And importantly, the process of experimenting shows what's in it for them. There's a sense that this will help people do their work better."

AI experiments currently underway include automated summaries and image generation for the Content workstream, simulations for the Coaching workstream and skills inference and definition for the Skills and assessment workstream.

Ideas can come into the community from various routes, not just from L&D. In the monthly Learning NEXT forum on Microsoft Teams, ideas will be shared by the community, and they can come in from outside. Last year, a team of five experimented with text-to-video tools, driven by demand from content creators and management, who see this as a useful way to reduce the time needed for creating a range of content types.

In contrast, the team looking at AI-driven translation is driven by reducing time and saving money within the L&D department and beyond. The assessment is that GPT 4 is good enough to handle translations across 21 languages evaluated by Learning NEXT members. Not only will it cut costs by 80-90% and be faster, but it will also improve inclusivity, as cost previously prohibited some materials from being translated.

AI is also helping with efficiencies around skills. Ericsson has automated the updating of its skills taxonomy and is using text-to-text generative AI to help with definitions of market- and Ericsson-sourced skills. In addition to definitions, AI is being used for skills inference, where skills are inferred from job and learning history data to better understand the supply of skills within Ericsson.

The team is also interested in how AI can potentially democratise the world of coaching, enabling access to career coaching for the many rather than the few. This is another area of investigation where the L&D team is connecting with a group of technical talent to create an experimental app.

The final element is the decision-making process for the adoption of new technologies. After business requirements are identified and potential solutions are tested comes the key decision: whether to buy, build or wait. That final possibility of waiting is a crucial option in a field as fast-moving as AI and includes the party tools for supporting Microsoft Office products before they introduced their powerful Copilots.

Peter Sheppard, Head of Learning Ecosystem, comments that "Our Learning NEXT program led by Pauline has leveraged the power of community to experiment with the possibilities of AI in Learning. This has given us a number of efficiencies from content production to skills but our main ambition is that it creates new possibilities in democratising access to more learning in the flow of work."

Challenges and lessons learnt

- ***Senior buy-in:*** *This has not been an issue at Ericsson, but it is doubtful that the current approaches would have succeeded without existing buy-in from Peter Sheppard, Head of the Global L&D Ecosystem and others at senior executive level.*
- ***Community management:*** *The Learning NEXT community thrives because it is constantly managed, with regular meetings and communication. This level of trust and engagement is no accident; it has taken over two years to build.*

Next steps

1. Ericsson will steadily increase its testing of applications of AI across the four workstreams.
2. Learner empowerment is a key factor – Ericsson is looking to use AI to encourage 'pull' learning rather than 'push' training.

> *"[The community] works because of the people, and the permission to fail, and because it shows what's in it for them. There's a sense that this will help people do their work better."*
>
> **Pauline Rebourgeon,** Head of Learning Technology and Innovation

Case study 5 - Leyton

Measuring coaching impact on customer conversations

James Swift, Director of Talent Development

Abstract: *The hybrid work environment makes it difficult to track how people are using coaching and if it's having any impact. James Swift's team have modified an AI tool to help them track the use of core skills in customer conversations, continuously improve coaching, and measure the business impact of L&D.*

Problem and solution

Leyton is an international consulting firm that helps businesses leverage financial incentives. It operates in 16 countries and has over 3,000 employees.

As a consultancy, Leyton is a people-centric organisation and an accredited Exceptional Learning Organisation. Its L&D uses situational and skills coaching as the main L&D activity and impact lever in about 90% of its programmes.

The L&D team first started exploring AI three to four years ago, when the pandemic triggered the move from an office-based to a hybrid work culture and made it more difficult to observe coaching and its impact. They started by analysing customer conversations for the outbound sales team. For example, when the company launched a new product, they could track if and how well someone used the product training in their customer conversations. If a conversation ended in a positive outcome, it was possible to see what made the call successful and therefore establish a clear link between L&D and job performance. Iterative improvements in coaching led to a 50% increase in performance over a five-month period of a new joiner.

The tool was then scaled to measure core competencies across all the teams at Leyton. When the business was looking at client retention, with the help of AI, L&D could measure the skills associated with it. This helped identify six key conversations across the client journey that happen with every customer.

Working with AI, Leyton's L&D:

- *Identified the people who were doing the best job and analysed their calls to understand what they were doing right.*
- *Formalised the results of that analysis into a best-practice, identifying about 8 skills that needed to be deployed in a call. For example, how to introduce yourself to effectively communicate expertise.*
- *Measured how often those best-practice skills were being deployed in customer calls, which at first was very sporadic.*
- *Provided specific coaching to upskill the entire organisation on best-practice customer interactions. Although led by L&D, this would involve managers as well.*

Within an eight-month period, 80% of best practice skills were being deployed in 80% of client calls. These numbers would be regularly reported in senior leadership meetings, making it a process of continuous improvement and monitoring.

While initially Leyton used Refract AI (acquired by Allego), they have now moved to Salesforce Einstein and worked with the supplier to customise the 'skills scorecard' to pick up on specific skills in customer conversations.

Nowadays, Leyton offers one-to-one coaching for in the region of 200 calls a month. On top of that, managers check and give informal feedback on approximately 3,000 calls a month.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- ***Be prepared to be wrong:*** *As head of L&D, I always have the same two questions about our interventions: 'Are people using my stuff?' and 'Does it actually work?' This kind of technology allows you to get to the truth for both questions. It bypasses feedback and opinion and gives you complete clarity on what is happening when people go back to their day-to-day jobs. Although this technology will make you more effective, you need to be prepared to find out that you may have been wasting your time up until this point.*
- ***Business alignment:*** *For this type of tool to be successful, it needs to be used. Therefore, to get buy-in from each team to use it, you need to understand what challenges they want to use it for – and this may not align to your initial use case. It's important that you are close to the team, and you have alignment on the use case. This means you may have to change your original hopes as to what it could be used for. Working with all your stakeholders to get agreement is absolutely key.*
- ***Communication:*** *The tool will give you a lot of insights that can help every department improve. Find a way to share regular insights that helps everyone move forward. Report regularly, and change your reports depending on the needs of each stakeholder community.*

Next steps

1. Moving beyond customer conversations to all customer interactions: expanding the use of AI to track the cadence of customer contact and the quality and effectiveness of written communication.

> *"This project has made us better in L&D. It gave us visibility over what we needed to see. It made us more efficient…It made it very easy to prioritise coaching, which always falls off the radar in any organisation."*
>
> **James Swift,** Director of Talent Development

Case study 6 - HSBC

Improving performance with coaching bots

Daniel Redman, Distribution Manager

Abstract: *Since autumn 2022, HSBC contact centre agents have shown a demonstrable performance improvement through an AI coaching tool. The application of this tool demonstrates both the potential of AI in coaching and some of the practical issues around implementation.*

Problem and solution

HSBC is a multinational banking and financial services group headquartered in London, UK, with over 200,000 employees worldwide. Its contact centre staff, both directly employed and subcontracted, are essential for providing customer service, especially to retail banking clients.

Contact centres are a unique learning and performance challenge in three ways:

- ***Onboarding:*** *Turnover is higher in contact centres than in regular employment. New staff must be trained on complex financial products and procedures and coached on how to work with and protect customers.*
- ***Ongoing coaching:*** *Once they are in-role, agents need ongoing coaching to maintain and develop their skills. In contact centres, agents' time is at a premium, and closely monitored, so there is always a strong focus on the efficiency of training delivery.*
- ***Change management:*** *When something changes in the bank, giving people the chance to practice before they make the call.*

The tool used by Daniel Redman was Zenerate, a web-based tool founded in 2017 and designed especially for use in contact centres. It provides functionality typical of AI coaching tools, including onboarding, ongoing coaching, and analysis of live calls. AI coaching tools effectively provide what Daniel calls a 'conversation simulator', similar to a flight simulator, the opportunity to repeatedly practise in a safe environment.

Conversations with AI tools can be more or less structured. A conversation purely using generative AI could go in any direction and has limited use for focused training. AI conversational coaching tools for contact centres create a conversation around a pre-determined structure. At HSBC these are called 'stories'. Based on transcripts of successful call handling, each deals with a particular scenario. HSBC currently has around 100 stories.

The tool can be used for guided practice, where agents are presented with prompts in their conversations with clients. These can be either verbal or written. Agents then progress to free practice, receiving coaching during and after the call. Data on agents' performance in training shows when they are ready to move from practice to live work with real customers or if they need any further training and coaching.

Daniel's team created an initial set of stories. Before the rollout, a team of 15 people tested and refined these over a period of four months. Then, in the autumn of 2022, they added the AI tool to the onboarding programme, where it was used by a relatively small number of people—50 to 60 people each month. The new onboarding programme was a success, but it was impossible to isolate the role of the AI tool in the success of the overall programme.

Some staff members treated the idea of an AI tool for training with caution and scepticism, believing that coaching was best delivered by a human being. Because it required an initial financial outlay, it was essential to prove the impact of the tool.

Use of the tool was then extended to coaching, and from February 2024 it became available to 2,500 staff in HSBC's contact centres worldwide.

Extending the use of the tool in this way produced the necessary evidence of its success:

- ***Re-allocation of resources:*** *people were re-assigned from coaching and training roles to direct work with clients, to a value of £1m of salary.*
- ***Feedback:*** *according to staff surveys, agents enjoy using the tool and feel more confident and less stressed.*
- ***Improved quality scores:*** *onshore agents using the tool over a test period scored 95.8% versus 87.5% for those not using it. Offshore agents benefited too: users in the test group scored 98% on quality against 88% for non-users.*

Challenges and lessons learnt

- ***Be clear about your goals:*** *Start with the business issue and identify where your AI tool can help you. It will not be equally useful for everything. Focus it where it works best.*
- ***Build trust from the start:*** *People can be sceptical about AI, especially for something like coaching. Start with limited goals and build trust. If you initially turn people off the idea of using AI, it will be twice as hard to regain their trust. Roll out slowly and listen to feedback constantly on the way.*

Next steps

1. Extending the role of AI-supported coaching to other areas, such as leadership and difficult conversations.
2. Sharing good practice with other HSBC operations internationally.

> *"The key thing we learned was to answer the question 'What are the right things to use AI for?'"*
>
> **Daniel Redman,** Distribution Manager

Case study 7 - Norsk Hydro

Enabling personalised skills and learning recommendations

Jeanine Fremstad, Global Lead of Skills and Learning

Abstract: *Employees feel that they can't find the right professional development opportunities while the business can't identify and allocate the right skills to projects. Jeanine Fremstad has combined generative AI and third-party tools to lead the implementation of a skills management solution that will power skills and learning recommendations for employees. The ambition is to make learning and development more targeted and relevant, attract and retain talent, and provide leaders with better skills and workforce insights.*

Problem and solution

Norsk Hydro is a global aluminium and renewable energy company with over 33,000 employees in 40 countries. Despite everything on offer at the company, internal research has shown that a third of employees are unsatisfied with the opportunities for professional development, future careers and equal opportunities, all while the business is experiencing skills gaps.

To address this discrepancy, Group HR is taking advantage of AI-enabled skills technology to better understand the skills the company has at present and would need in the future, with the view to use this intelligence to enable AI-driven learning recommendations and to eventually use skills as the 'red thread' throughout all HR processes.

The implementation has woven regular generative AI and third-party skills technology, with generative AI particularly useful in preparing and validating skills data. It has been a multi-step process that is still in progress:

1. To avoid creating multiple skills profiles across different learning platforms, Norsk Hydro's Skills and Learning team decided to enrol in the early adopter programme offered by SuccessFactors, who are creating their own skills technology.

2. The team used generative AI to translate all 33,000 position titles from multiple source languages, before handing them over to an SAP partner along with Hydro's job architecture. All that data was then aligned with Lightcast's Open Skills Library to deliver a library curated for Norsk Hydro and made up of 4,000 skills.

3. With the help of an external consultant with prompting expertise, Jeanine spent several days using generative AI to validate and, in some cases, regroup the 4,000 skills as the initial output included nonsensical skills, duplicates or skills that had been mapped to the wrong job family groups.

4. When the skills library was ready, it was used to power the 'Growth Portfolio', a SuccessFactors AI engine for skills recommendations.

5. As part of this initiative, the team also wanted to introduce the 'skills' language to the leader-employee development dialogue, from exploring the individual's skill gaps to guiding them through the process. They used generative AI to help draft the new skills development process design.

6. In the meantime, the SAP partner is using its AI engine to tag all the learning items (totalling some 180,000) with skills from the company's skills library. This will enable better learning recommendations, search functionality and overall improved learning experience.

The Growth Portfolio is being piloted with three employee groups: finance and energy organisations, as well as the digital transition project for factory employees.

The Skills and Learning team expects to see increased skill levels, improved employee experience, engagement, reduced attrition and better insights for workforce planning.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- ***Unreliable AI:*** *AI's skills output required a lot of validation, tweaks and some reworking. Additional work was also required to improve the employee experience (for example, by making the skills categories and lists more intuitive to browse).*

- ***Keeping data current:*** *The skills library is based on a job architecture that is static and a few years old. Therefore, keeping the skills library updated and dynamic is a challenge without a clear solution yet.*

- ***Biased recommendations:*** *While not a challenge encountered before the pilot has finished, learning recommendations based on the user's activity and skills might end up boxing employees into echo chambers. This is an ongoing concern as the recommendation engine is getting deployed.*

Next steps

1. Finishing the pilots and assessing their results: quality of recommendations, engagement and attrition figures, level of employee experience.

2. Charting learning pathways through Norsk Hydro's extensive learning library based on the individual's career development goals, e.g. to get to expert level in a core skill.

> *"Generative AI has become this tool that we go to when we need to, in the same way that you would use Google. We're not using AI just to use AI. We're using it as support as we go about our regular work."*
>
> **Jeanine Fremstad,** Global Lead of Skills and Learning

Conclusion

It's time for action

If 2023 was the year of L&D's fascination with AI, then 2024 is the year of action, or at least its its beginning. When planning to put AI to use, we can learn a lot from those that have already started.

As illustrated by Egle's Complexity Scale, there is only one way to make the most of AI: to step out of the L&D department and engage with the business. Moving beyond productivity wins within the L&D department, more strategic use cases require a mandate that helps to unlock resources and shows the willingness of the business to tolerate experimentation, uncertainty and iterative development.

AI is not a single entity, existing by itself in isolation. It is a single term loosely used to describe a range of disparate activities that have in common: algorithms, large data sets and the need for considerable processing power. Making the most of AI involves L&D understanding its underlying mechanisms, its need for quality data, and finding the problems it could be most useful for. Following that, using AI solutions with impact means deploying them in close cooperation with departments outside L&D.

For L&D, this is both entirely novel and utterly familiar.

It is familiar because whether AI is used to support coaching, infer skills, personalise learning activities, or for any other reason, this is a learning technology implementation. There is a long history of L&D departments failing with such implementations because they miss the key steps at either end: discovery at the beginning, to understand the needs of the business; maintenance at the end, to ensure the implementation continues to provide value and adapts to changing circumstances.

There is nothing new here. To use AI well, L&D needs to do the boring stuff well: have the uncomfortable conversations, build the relationships, set the expectations, and be doggedly persistent against indifference and inertia.

As well as being familiar, though, AI is novel because of its dazzling power in bringing automation to previously untouched areas such as coaching and skills. Here, L&D needs to familiarise itself rapidly with the possibilities and limits of this astounding technology, so that it can make well-informed decisions about what can and cannot be done, as well as what should and should not be done.

AI can be compared to electricity – a technology with tremendous power, one that can both astound and damage, which can do a great deal, and which will eventually be built into tools that we use daily and take for granted (this already happens with speech recognition). None of this will happen overnight. The adoption of fundamental technologies in the past, such as electricity and the World Wide Web, shows that it may be years before AI is embedded into our lives in this way.

In the meantime, we can expect its scope to widen. It has moved on from the initial phase, where it is a substitution technology that does the old things more efficiently (typically content production). It is now being used to do old things in new ways (for example, building skills taxonomies), and will progress to doing new things in new ways, things that we cannot easily predict right now. This may include, for example, using organisational network analysis to understand human connections and surface, curate and share the tacit knowledge within them.

In 2023, the advice to L&D practitioners was to experiment, to become familiar with AI tools by putting them to use. That is now a given. The advice for 2024: step up. There is tremendous power in AI, and we must marry this to our understanding of learning for the benefit of both employers and employees.

This won't necessarily be easy. It will require learning new things around AI, and it will demand the relearning of what we should already know about learning technology implementations. In particular, in a world still uncertain about AI, it will be essential for L&D to build credibility with this technology, and to engender the one thing our case studies all shared: trust.

Last year, AI generated a lot of talk. This year, we can't wait for that talk to finish. It's time to move from talk to action.

About the authors

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Donald has chaired the Learning Technologies Conference in London since 2000 and writes and speaks world-wide about Learning and Development. His annual L&D Global Sentiment Survey, started in 2014, provides a unique perspective on L&D trends from some 4,000 people in over 100 countries. From 2010 to 2021, he chaired the Learning and Performance Institute.

He chairs the Workforce Development board for VC firm Emerge Education, and advises several EdTech start-ups.

The author of Learning Technologies in the Workplace, Donald is a graduate of Oxford University and the recipient of an honorary doctorate from London's Middlesex University.

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In her capacity as an advisor and researcher, she focuses on integrating AI into L&D operations and equipping workforces with the necessary skills for AI adoption across their organisations. Grounded in both research and practical application, Egle understands the ground zero of how AI is ushering in entirely new ways of doing things in the world of L&D, learning and edtech.

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